

How many small groups should I have?

Small group is defined as 2-8 children. Most teachers divide children into 3 or 4 groups, with 5-7 children per group. You should create groups based on children's needs, but how many groups you have is up to you.

Do I need the same number of groups all the time?

No – one week you might have 3 groups, another time you might choose to have 5 groups.

Do I have to have two teacher-led groups?

No. You may have only one teacher-led group while the second teacher monitors several independent groups. This is a management technique that works well at the beginning of the year as children are learning to work independently.

Can I put children in two groups of 10 for cooking or science experiments?

You may choose to divide children into two groups of 10 for cooking activities or other projects, but this cannot be counted as the required small group time. Remember small group is defined as 2-8 children.

How long should small group be?

Small group should be relatively short at the beginning of the year when children are learning routines. Most teachers find that 10 minutes is a good starting point. As the year progresses, you can increase this time.

Does small group always need to be the same length of time?

It may be different for different lessons – a math game might take only 10 minutes, while a small group reading discussion might engage children for 20 minutes.

Do I have to see each child every day?

No, but you should plan for each child every day. Some children will be in teacher-facilitated groups; others will be engaged in independent activities.

Do I have to identify the children in independent groups as well as in small groups?

Yes. List the children, along with the activities you have planned for them, in both independent and small groups.

What are some independent group activities? Can I use centers for independent groups?

Using your centers is a great way to spread independent activities throughout the classroom. However, don't tell children to "just go play." Give them specific tasks – writing in their journal, for example, or stringing beads in a pattern. Be sure to identify content standards for each independent activity.

How often do I need to change the children assigned to a small group? Can I keep the same children together for a week?

Small group composition should change frequently. This doesn't mean you have to change every day. However once or twice per semester is not often enough. If you are basing your groups on the needs and interests of the children then this will happen quite naturally. Many teachers find that changing each week works well for them.

How do I decide who goes in each group?

Base your groups primarily on assessment information. You may also consider learning styles and children's interests.

What are different ways to group children?

Homogeneously – all children in the group are on the same ability level. This allows you to focus your instruction on a specific skill or need.

Heterogeneously – there are mixed ability levels within the same group. This promotes peer teaching and encourages group interaction.

Both ways of grouping should be used in Pre-K, depending on the lesson objective and the needs of your children.

Can I repeat the same lesson for multiple groups?

There are some instances where you would repeat the same lesson for multiple groups of children – making a class book, for example. Other examples include a science experiment, a cooking activity or a follow-up to a field trip. Always ask yourself – do ALL children need the same experience?

Please explain reading in small groups with a follow-up activity.

At least once per week there should be a small group that involves reading to children and conducting a follow-up activity. This activity can be designed to encourage discussion and interaction – for example, predicting the outcome of the story, identifying the main characters, or retelling the story. Or you might choose to have children expand and practice concepts from the book – identifying characteristics of insects, for example, or playing a counting game.

Does every child have to participate in the weekly small group reading activity?

No. You do not have to do this with every child during the week. However, many very effective teachers choose to do this multiple times during the week.

What is scaffolding?

Scaffolding is providing support to a child to move him to the next level of learning. It requires that teachers be aware of the small, discrete steps (continuum) involved in acquiring a particular skill and that they know precisely where the child is on this continuum. Teachers can then model and provide feedback to guide children to the next level.

How do I show that I am scaffolding?

Assessment is key in planning lessons that scaffold learning. Basing lessons on assessment and grouping children accordingly will show you are aware of this important concept.

How much should I write in my lesson plan?

Enough so that someone else (a substitute, your supervisor, the Pre-K consultant) can identify the purpose of your lesson, the materials you are using, the content standard and the children who are involved. However, detailed, step-by-step directions are time-consuming and not necessary.

Example	Copy, extend, create patterns	←	brief description of lesson
	Ask children to “read” their patterns		
	(friend photos, paper strips, glue sticks)	←	materials
	MD2b	←	content standard(s)
	AJ, BW, CR, KL, ST	←	children assigned to group

Can I put small group work in a child’s portfolio?

Absolutely. There must be a balance of child-initiated and teacher-initiated work in the portfolios. A prime time to collect teacher-initiated work is during small group time.

Can the same thing be in several children’s portfolios?

Yes. Children that have participated in the same small group may have similar documentation. However, each child’s portfolio should be unique. There will be many items that are only in a single child's portfolio.

What makes something a ditto or worksheet?

A common characteristic of inappropriate dittos or worksheets is that there is a very narrow focus – only one right answer, for example. Typical examples of this kind of worksheet require children to circle or color or draw a line to indicate the correct answer.

Another common factor is that the work is done entirely in the child’s head; it is abstract with no concrete manipulation of objects. Pre-K children still need hands-on activities. Appropriate paper and pencil representations should always be grounded in these concrete experiences. Appropriate examples include math graphs or science data sheets; these help children begin to abstractly represent a concrete experience.

Does every small group have to result in a product?

No. A small group may involve playing a game, for example, or a book discussion.

Do I have to assess every small group activity?

It is not necessary to assess every activity. Some lessons should be for introduction of a skill or for practice. Plan a few key assessments each week to make the process manageable. For example, one week you may decide to collect work samples from a science lesson, create a matrix for a math activity and take notes in the personal social domain during independent groups.